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ABSTRACT

This research examined the images of teaching that students early in their teacher certification program had about teaching and teacher roles. These images portrayed students' expectations of teaching and teachers and aspirations for their future careers. A group of 33 student teachers from a foundational course in educational psychology participated in reflective activities throughout the semester. They designed a creative representation of teaching or of themselves as teachers, focusing on what they had learned about educational psychology and what they had come to understand about teaching over the course of the semester. The representations were grouped into one of four domains of images of teaching: representations of private personal experiences in school or childhood; representations of personal struggles in choosing to teach; representations of good teaching; and representations of passion for content specialty. The creative representations of teaching varied in style, type, and depth. Collages and poems were the creation type most frequently represented, followed by artwork of various forms. Students discussed their goals as part and parcel of the experiences they had in school themselves. Although some experiences were much more deeply rooted in a personal and emotional nature, all of the students based their images of teaching on their own personal experiences as students. (Contains 24 references.) (SM)

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ED 478 625

Images of Teaching

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Images of Teaching

Introduction

Learning to teach is a complex process that begins long before pre-service teachers enter college (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996). From a very early age, students are surrounded by formal education's teaching experiences. By the time college students enroll in a teacher education program, they have spent at least 13 years in formal academic settings. During this "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975), students begin to develop their images of what a teacher is and does. Their early experiences filter the curricula found in more formal academic learning later introduced in teacher education programs (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996; Putnam & Borko, 1997). For pre-service teachers, this filtering determines how their university experiences will be interpreted (Ross, Johnson, & Smith, 1991). As teacher educators, it is important for us to be aware of the beliefs and representations pre-service teachers have about teaching so that we can help them grow in their development as teachers (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Cole & Knowles, 2000).

The purpose of this research was to examine the images of teaching that students early in their teaching certification program have about teaching and their roles as teachers. These images portray students' expectations of teaching and teachers, and aspirations for their future career. This study investigated one key question: How do pre-service teachers represent their image of teaching?

Literature Review

Learning to teach is a developmental process (Munby, Russell, & Martin, 2001), one that is built upon throughout the years, and one that changes and evolves. Across this time, teachers make sense of their personal experiences through interpretation and the creation of

unique frameworks of knowledge (Resnick, 1991; Richardson, 1999). As such, learning to teach is cumulative in nature, in that teachers learn from past experiences and these experiences filter future learning in the process of learning to teach. So strong, in fact, are these experiences that researchers (e.g., Zeichner, 1986, 1987) have argued for the need for conceptualizations of how these individual characteristics interact with teacher education programs.

We have known for some time now that pre-service teachers do not typically develop new perspectives throughout the course of their teacher education programs (Stofflett & Stoddart, 1992; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981) unless they are confronted with their held beliefs (Tom, 1997). They typically enter pre-service education programs as idealistic, liberal, and humanistic, and they tend to see teaching as a mechanical transfer of information (Richardson, 1996). In spite of most university programs' attempts to help prospective teachers learn to teach in ways that are fundamentally different from how they were themselves taught, most pre-service teachers leave the program with the same enduring beliefs as they entered the program with (Stofflet & Stoddard, 1992). Furthermore, these individual beliefs and characteristics tend to persist into the career of the practicing teacher. As Calderhead (1988) noted, becoming and staying a teacher involves complex changes and development not only in teaching behavior but also in cognition and emotion and these changes occur within powerful contexts. Calderhead and Robson (1991) suggested that the alternative to changing beliefs is to build on the beliefs that already exist.

Pre-service teachers can be guided in building on their beliefs through the use of reflective practices (Houston & Warner, 2000). Reflection is undertaken not so much to revisit the past or to become aware of the metacognitive process one is experiencing, but rather to guide future action (Brubacher, Case & Reagan, 1994). Kagan (1992) has told us that teaching remains ". . . rooted in personality and experience and that learning to teach requires a journey

into the deepest recesses of one's self-awareness, where failures, fears, and hopes are hidden" (p. 137). This journey requires reflection into what is considered of value and importance in our teaching. Learning how to teach is a deeply personal activity in which the teacher must consider his or her prior beliefs and reconcile them with the expectations of the university, the public school, the students, the parents, and ultimately him or herself. In her analysis of teacher education program studies, Grossman (1989) reported that empowered teachers blossomed in programs where this kind of deliberative exploration and reflection were encouraged.

Furthermore, helping pre-service teachers identify, build on, and challenge their prior experiences and beliefs may be one way to help candidates with different backgrounds begin to understand and appreciate the complexities that exist in daily classroom life. When they can begin to see beyond their own world and into others, they will begin to see that the methods, management, and content will vary given particular schools and students (Hollingsworth, 1989). They will confront the fact that there is no one right answer to many classroom dilemmas. In this way, teachers become students of teaching (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995). They confront the complexity and question the situations. They learn to become problem solvers rather than managers.

Methodology

Setting and Participants

This research evolved from an undergraduate foundations course in educational psychology for pre-service teachers at a large Research I university in the southeastern United States. This course is typically the first professional education course that all teacher education students take in their respective sequence of program requirements. In the spring 2002 semester, 33 students participated in the study. The students ranged from sophomores to

seniors and consisted of six males and 27 females. All students were enrolled in a program leading to teaching certification at the elementary or secondary level. Five of the students were enrolled in an elementary certification program; 29 students were enrolled in a program leading to secondary certification. They were not, of course, obligated to allow us to share their work through the research process. One of the total 34 students in the class declined based on her concern that her creation was too personal to share widely.

Procedures

The students in this course participated in reflective activities throughout the semester. Four reflection papers were required during the semester wherein students were asked to focus on personal experiences related to the content being covered in the class. For example, in the first paper prior to a general discussion of characteristics of effective teaching, the students were asked to write a reflection paper outside of class about their favorite teachers, their favorite class, or about a teacher or class they did not enjoy as much as others. The reflection papers were then brought back into the discussion about effective teachers by discussing the practices or characteristics of teachers that made their classes more enjoyable or less so. Of the four reflection papers, only the final reflection papers were analyzed for this research. The final reflection paper of the course asked the students to step back and create an image of teaching based on the entire semester of study.

Specifically, the students were asked to design a creative representation of teaching or of themselves as teachers. They were also asked to write their final reflection paper by focusing on what they had learned about educational psychology and what they had come to understand about teaching during the course of the semester. This assignment is the initial step of a program requirement for each pre-service teacher to develop a philosophy of teaching and learning for their portfolio – the capstone experience across all programs. The only restriction

placed on the students in developing their creation was that it was not meant to be a "paper." It was meant to be a creative, artistic representation.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The representations were created outside of class and were submitted to the instructor during the final class meeting of the semester. Each creative project was analyzed along with its accompanying reflection paper. Analysis of this data was based on qualitative methods using the constant-comparative method to determine patterns or themes in the representations (Glaser & Straus, 1967; Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam (1998), the "constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. Data are grouped together on a similar dimension" (p. 18). Each creative project, along with its accompanying reflection paper, was analyzed. Domains of artifacts were first determined. Thematic categorical patterns within each domain were then discerned for each student and then across the group. While each representation might have been found to have features of multiple domains (as noted in Appendix A), the predominant domain is used in our illustrative examples for the purposes of our discussion. Categories within each domain are described with examples from the data.

Findings

The representations were organized into one of four domains of images of teaching. Those domains are: 1) representations of private personal experiences in school or childhood, 2) representations of personal struggles in choosing to teach, 3) representations of good teaching, and 4) representations of passion for content specialty. The creative representations of teaching were varied in their style, type, and depth. Collages and poems were the creation type most frequently represented, followed by artwork of various forms. There were several

posters, models, and one pastel drawing. Two students wrote short stories about their struggles in school and of choosing to teach, and one student even wrote a song.

As the representations were analyzed, the very personal nature in which these representations were constructed became apparent. Also evident was the importance the students' own past personal experiences and how they had played a part in forming their beliefs about good teaching, in determining their goals, and in developing the fears and concerns they have about teaching. These different elements were all rooted in personal experiences of some kind that the students considered to be either positive or negative in nature. For example, the students characterized good teaching based on what they remembered from their school days about teachers who were classified as clearly "good" teachers or clearly "bad" teachers. Their reflection papers supported their representation by talking about their artifact in more detail and by providing the context from which the artifact developed.

The personal could not be parsed out of any of the representations. However, one domain does exist in this analysis that is more deeply rooted in the personal experience of the students. This is the domain referred to as 'private personal experiences.' This domain includes experiences that more directly impacted the psyche or the humanity of the student and was based more in a deep emotional reaction. Each domain is discussed and examples from the students' works are shared to illustrate the themes within each domain.

Representations of Private Personal Experiences in School or Childhood

The general categories of private personal experience depicted how individual students were treated on an interpersonal plane – either positively or negatively. These representations tended to be the most emotionally raw and were usually representative of some deeply felt emotion the pre-service teacher remembered experiencing. The majority of these very personal

experiences were negative, although a few were more positive. On the positive side, the following student remembered an outstanding teacher in this way:

> I remembered back to one of my high school teachers, Mr. Bowman, and in my eyes, he was amazing. He taught me so much and I really attribute who I am today because of his encouragement and knowledge. Anyone can be a teacher, but it takes a special person to be a Mr. Bowman.

In contrast, here is one of many negative experiences described by the students:

> Throughout my elementary to high school years, I was made fun of because of how white I was and how I didn't dress in certain types of clothing and how I had no friends. This is where I got to meet all the kids that were just like me. I got to become friends with the less social students, the lower class students and all the students that had a disability. We were all outcasts. Being talked down to by kids and embarrassed by teachers. God, just thinking back to it is so hard. I personally believe that these students are the types of people that have the largest hearts and the most drive to be someone when they are older. It just matters how this is pulled out of them. But, all our teachers just looked at us as throw-aways because we would never matter anyway, we could never achieve. I don't want to ever see a student as not mattering or not good enough to waste my time on.

The writing process itself prompted deep emotion. That is, as students wrote their reflections and designed their creations by remembering personal experiences, some mentioned becoming angry, some mentioned becoming emotionally upset, and some became even more excited about entering the teaching field when they thought back to what their teachers had done for, or to, them. For example, one student seemed to get angrier and angrier as he wrote and finally remembered his teachers as "raw, undesirable bitches." One student could vividly

remember the embarrassment he felt early in his ninth grade year when he over-energetically raised his hand to answer a math question. His image of teaching was presented in the form of a short story about the good and the bad that teachers can do to students. His short story is based on the following experience he shared in his reflection paper. This is his memory:

> "Oh, so you think you know all about math, do ya, little rascal? Well why don't you come up here to the board and show us what you know?" I can still hear the sarcastic tone in her voice. "Sure. No sweat." "OK, hot shot, why don't you solve this equation for the class?" I panicked. How can I solve an equation when we haven't learned that yet? I had never seen anything like it! How can you divide 3.2 by a letter? "Er, I don't know how to do this," I squeaked. "Of course you don't, you hot-shot little hoodlum. You don't know much of anything. Why don't you go sit down and shut up before you embarrass yourself more, mm-kay?" Go sit down. That's what I did, quiet and defeated for the rest of the year. By the end of the year, I hated the teacher, I hated school, and I hated math. Wow, and I thought I was good in math.

Whether their experience was positive or negative, one constant remained. The students' experiences affected their goals as a teacher or what they considered to be good teaching. They either wanted to be just like a teacher they had or they wanted to be nothing at all like a teacher they had known.

Representations of Personal Struggles in Choosing to Teach

Several of the students talked about the struggle they had in trying to decide if teaching was the career for them. Many of them expressed very typical concerns of new teachers – an immense workload, dealing with administrators and parents, being able to effectively work with special needs children, and losing control of the class. A few of them had struggles a little more difficult to tackle. A few of the students discussed being concerned about the relative

low status of teaching as a profession (Griffin, 1999). One student wrote of the disappointment his parents felt in him choosing to become a teacher:

> The last factor that stood in my way to becoming a teacher was the approval of my parents. They had always supported me in everything I had ever done. But, being typical parents, they wanted me to be a doctor or to be in some field where I could live comfortably. They bought me a set of medical encyclopedias before I was even toilet trained hoping it would give me encouragement to that career. It might seem silly to buy a kid a set of encyclopedias, but my dad's intentions were very noble. He did not grow up in ideal circumstances. He never knew his father and his mother did not play a major role in his life. He lived with his grandparents in a lower class neighborhood. My mom's situation was even worse. She grew up in Bethlehem and had to experience a full-fledged war. She would have to go to a neighbor's house because they had a basement that would protect them from the Israeli air raids. Her family did not have much money, neither did any other Palestinian family. She lived in a two room apartment with her parents and two siblings. My parents' lives were unbelievably tough and they wanted me to have everything. When I finally told them I wanted to be a teacher, they said they were happy for me, but I could see their disappointment that I was entering a field that wouldn't provide the wealth of a doctor or engineer. It makes me feel guilty and that guilt weighs heavy on me. I finally realized why I want to teach so much. I want to make a difference. I want kids to see no matter what hell they come from, they can succeed.

Representations of Good Teaching

The images of this domain typically reflected the characteristics of a good teacher or they represented the characteristics of effective teaching. Two thematic categories of

information cut across this data set. The students focused on characteristics of teachers that were related to the managerial aspects of teaching and to the affective dispositions of the teachers. This category of representations and reflections were again based in students' personal experiences as they harkened back to classes they enjoyed or to teachers from whom they had learned a lot. Unlike the private personal experience domain, in this domain, the student emphasized the positive rather than the negative. Their characteristics represented those personal memories of enjoyable learning experiences. For example:

> I want to be just like my sixth grade teacher. She was incredible. She always told us we could do whatever we wanted to do if we worked hard. But more than that, she helped us work hard. Sometimes kids just don't know what to do. You know, you tell them to go work harder, but you have to tell them how to do that sometimes. She never let us fail. I want to be that special teacher. I want my students to look back and actually remember what I taught them, but more importantly, I want them to remember I was somebody they could trust.

Other students realized they had good teachers and classes they enjoyed, but wanted to understand what the teacher did to create that environment. After all, they were studying teaching and teachers. For example:

> As a student interested in teaching, I've been watchful of which teaching methods are effective and engaging, and I know what I, and others, have enjoyed, but now I'm wondering what the teacher specifically did to create that. How can I do that for my students? When I can answer that, then I'll really know what a good teacher is.

And others based their ideas of what a good teacher is by experiencing what teachers shouldn't be:

> Many of my teachers weren't making a difference. They were talking and giving tests, but they hardly knew who was in their room, much less what confused us. They only cared if we passed the state test so they threw information at us. They didn't care if we really learned. I want my students to be more than a test score. I want to know who they are and how to help them. A good teacher knows her students and what they need.

Representations of Passion for Content Specialty

Images for this domain were the fewest in number, but they were still very much based in the personal experiences of the pre-service teachers. In this domain, the categories lined up according to discipline. For example, there was a group of pre-service teachers in the field of agricultural education. These students chose their teaching career based on the love of the way in which they had been raised – on farms, raising cattle and learning the importance of agriculture to the world. These students felt very strongly about the importance of their field and shared a passion for wanting to share that with others. One student wrote, "This is what I truly want to share with people, my joy of our living environment." Another student wrote about her concerns about being able to deal with high school students, but said:

> I am prepared to face anything in order to teach agriculture. I have had such good experiences with agriculture that I want others to have the same chance. I want to make it my goal to have my students so involved in agriculture that they continue in the field after they finish my class.

Agriculture students were not the only pre-service teachers devoted to their content specialty. This French student said:

> My goal for my students is not for them to master and use the French language throughout their lives, although I would love that. I want to create a spark for them into

the understanding of other cultures, and the possibilities that are open to them in the world.

And finally, this ESL student who has worked with families from many cultures summed it all up very nicely:

> I have learned about the world by looking in the eyes of different people who cannot speak my language and only know a world that is foreign to me. I see how other people live, what they eat, and how they feel about life. They offer me a perspective that I would never have had unless they had come into my life. I always come away from teaching these people with more than I came in with. I want to give something back for everything that they have given me.

Summary

This investigation extends the research on the importance of personal histories in the development of a teacher persona and perspective (e.g., Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Cole & Knowles, 2000). In essence, the past histories of the students and how those histories affect their concerns and beliefs about teachers and teaching. These pre-service teachers discussed their goals as part and parcel of the experiences they had when they were in school themselves. Although some experiences were much more deeply rooted in a personal and emotional nature, all of the students based their images of teaching on their own personal experiences as students. It became apparent that they were indeed filtering their academic learning (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996, Putnam & Borko, 1997) with their earliest experiences of teaching.

Conclusion

This reflective and creative assignment allowed the pre-service teachers to explore their experiences and to relate them to what they were learning in their educational psychology course. They began to see teaching and education through a teacher lens while drawing on

their personal student experiences, thus, building on prior beliefs as Calderhead and Robson (1991) have suggested is important in teacher education. Creating these images seems to provide students with the impetus to dig deeper into their thoughts and beliefs, as creative projects often do. The reflections allow the students to articulate the meaning behind their image and they also seem to allow many of the students to crystallize their ideas and collect their thoughts, as writing often does. The two tasks combined provide a powerful tool for the students to think about teaching and a powerful tool for the instructor to understand the students and to help them grow as teachers.

Of particular note is the propensity for these students to view these complexities of teaching and being a teacher in a very dualist manner (Baxter-Magolda, 1992). That is, in constructing these artifacts, the students depicted good teaching in terms of teachers who were either good or bad, actions that were either good or bad, activities that were either good or bad. Now, while the task itself may have prompted that response, it is not certain. However, what is certain is that these students are still in the process of creating their own categories and are not yet able to clearly detect a good teacher, a teaching life, or a program in terms of gradations of black or white. Future research should follow the students over time to assess their development of a teaching philosophy and life. Of special interest would be those critical incidents that prompt or accelerate a major move for the teacher.

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APPENDIX A

Domain Analysis of Student Images

Representation	1. Personal experience	2. Career struggle	3. A good teacher	4. Passion for content area
1. Log	X		X	
2. Mobile			X	
3. Floppy Disk w/ pictures	X	X		
4. Song	X			
5. Paper Dolls			X	
6. Pinwheel			X	
7. Metaphor			X	
8. Poem		X		
9. Poem	X	X		
10. Poem	X	X		X
11. Poem	X			
12. Poem			X	
13. Poem			X	
14. Short Story		X		
14. Short Story	X			
15. Collage	X			
16. Collage				X
17. Collage			X	
18. Picture Book	X			X
19. Clip Art			X	
20. Clip Art	X			
21. Clip Art			X	
22. Clip Art			X	
23. Drawing	X		X	
24. Coloring Book			X	
25. Abstract Painting			X	
26. Poster - pictures			X	
27. Poster - pictures	X			
28. Poster - drawing			X	
29. Poster - drawing			X	
30. Poster - collage			X	
31. Poster - collage				X
32. Poster - collage			X	X
33. Flower arrangement			X	

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